

The Well-Informed Spy David Cort

The perfect spy is not the judo and seduction champion of spy fiction, but merely a well-informed man, sober, painstaking, ingenious, socially eligible, with a solid career, a wife and children, and a first-class camera. This spy is very productive and very hard to catch.

The press is now trying to digest this paragon in the person of Colonel Stig Eric Constans Wennerstroem of the Swedish Air Force, who was at least a double agent from 1948 to the day of his arrest in June, 1963—a span that makes the profession almost reputable. The censored burden of his evidence in Stockholm has been reprinted by the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and released by its chairman, Senator Eastland of Mississippi, November 30, 1964.

According to Wennerstroem, U.S. intelligence, as it is called, now employs more than 100,000 people; Soviet intelligence more than 150,000. Information must be obtained between wars; when the shooting starts, it is too late, as the United States discovered in World War II. Most good information comes from a jigsaw puzzle pieced out of bits from many sources.

David Cort's latest book is Social Astonishments (Macmillan).

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Each duplicating tidbit is a check on the reliability of the others. American intelligence is (or was) so crude that it used Wennerstroem's actual name in a coded radio message which the Russians monitored, and readily deciphered. The exposure scene, when the Russians accused him of being a double agent, must have been terrifying. The Russians forgave him (frightened, he was presumably more valuable than ever), but he did not forgive the Americans whom he gulled from then on. His fury at the Americans is understandable; he simply did not realize that at the heart of the great American know-how, there is that endearing tendency to goof off.

Wennerstroem never goofed. Very early he wanted to be better informed, and during a few idle weeks in 1930 took up the study of Russian. In 1933, he won a scholarship to study Russian further in Latvia, where he met an American officer serving in the British secret service who occasionally went into Russia in Latvian uniform. Wennerstroem was intrigued by the glamour of the masquerade. He also proved to be a local success in diplomatic society, "a peculiarly individual form of social life," for which his perfectly correct manners fitted him. By 1940 it was natural that he

should become the Swedish air attaché in Moscow, where at that particular time everybody was spying on everybody and "you could see how some information items went round and round in circles." The Nazis were the first to spot his abilities and he shared his good information with them; in return, they cut him in on their arrangement to buy cheap rubles from the Japanese who sent a regular ruble courier to Iran. He thought, perhaps incorrectly, that the Kremlin had learned of Hitler's Barbarossa plan against Russia. Back in Stockholm before the invasion, he got on especially well with the embassy personnel of the United States, the USSR (Madame Kollontay) and Nazi Germany, a catholic choice of friends. To the last he provided the Germans with free information that won him the favorable attention of General Gehlen's intelligence outfit. He wrote a military aviation column for a Swedish newspaper, for which he had contempt, and he did not yet consider himself a spy.

The war ends, and the United States realizes it badly needs an intelligence organization, and here is General Gehlen with his thriftily hoarded Nazi records, and here is the name of Wennerstroem as "a